

AUDUBONIANA.

BY S. N. RHOADS.

THE three Audubon letters herewith presented recently came into my possession and were found to contain so much of an apparently unpublished character of interest to ornithologists that it was thought best to have them printed.

All were written to Edward Harris of Moorestown, one of the most faithful and helpful friends of Audubon during his life, and the one man, not related to the Audubon family, who most substantially aided the widow of J. J. Audubon in the financial difficulties which she underwent just prior to Edward Harris's death in 1863.

The light thrown upon Audubon's relations with, and attitude toward, contemporary American and English ornithologists, especially Townsend, Nuttall, and Bonaparte, is of no small value and significance. So little indeed do we know about Townsend, outside his charming and classic 'Narrative,' that these historic references to him by such a man as Audubon are a precious legacy and but confirm the impression that with Townsend there prematurely perished one of the humblest, gentlest, and therefore truly greatest, of Nature's noblemen.

Perhaps at no period in Audubon's life was the pressure greater, from the literary and scientific side, than when these letters were written to Harris. The insatiable claims of *priority* had taken fast hold upon a spirit naturally averse to technique and artificiality, and in his journal of even date we see how he occasionally revolted against this form of slavery and sighed for the woods and fields.

Within the mere closet naturalist these heart to heart talks of the Great Bird Lover with his scholarly friend may stir no emotions deeper than curiosity, but there are others who can keenly sympathize with Audubon's struggles in a foreign land to forestall his friendly rivals on both sides of the Atlantic, and can forgive the importunity, suspicion, vanity and supersensitiveness which tormented his artistic, freedom-loving soul in the greatest crisis of his life.

LETTER NO. I.¹

Duplicate

London, Oct. 26th., 1837.

I have this moment received your dear letter of the 4. instant, for the contents of which, I do indeed most truly thank you, but the most important point contained in it, Dr. Spencer is now at Paris quite well and quite happy. I have not heard of his supposed intentions to visit Russia, at least not until you have shewn yourself in Europe for awhile. When will you come? I have not received one single letter from Dr. Morton since my return to England, and have been the more surprised at this, because I look upon *him* as a worthy good man and as on one whom, since my last visit to him, I cannot but consider as my friend.

The return of Dr. Townsend to our happy land has filled me with joy, and trebly so when you tell me that he is as friendly disposed to me as I ever have been towards him. I congratulate you, my dear friend, in the step which you have so kindly taken in my favour, by first selecting all such Birdskins as you or Townsend have considered as new, and also in having given freedom to Dr. Morton to pay Dr. Townsend Fifty Dollars for the skins selected by you, under the *prudent* considerations or restrictions talked of in your letter. May I receive all the Bird skins very soon, for depend upon it, now or never is for me the period to push on my publication. If I have any regret to express it is, that Townsend or Dr. Morton or yourself did not at once forward to me the *whole* of the Bird skins brought latterly by Townsend, for I can assure you that it has become a matter of the *greatest nicety* to distinguish the slight though *positive* species lines of demarkation between our species of Birds — and if on this reaching you, the least doubt exists amongst yourselves respecting any one, why send it to me at once by the very earliest conveyance. If by New York, with letter to M. Berthoud to lose not a day, provided a packet, either to *Liverpool*

¹ Outside address :

To Ed^d Harris Esq^r.

Moorestown New Jersey

9 miles from Philadelphia Pennsylvania

U. S. A.

or London, is ready to sail! Had Townsend sent me the *whole* of his disposable birds, I might now have perhaps been able to have mad[e] him a remittance in cash, which the single arrival of the German Naturalists, who are now in California may hereafter put an end to. Mention this to him, nay, shew him this letter if you please and assure him that I am willing to exert myself in his behalf. Indeed, I wish you to urge him in forwarding me either his own manuscripts or a copy of all such parts as appertain to Birds, as soon as possible, knowing (I think) that he will not undertake to publish them himself under his present (I am sorry to say) embarrassed pecuniary circumstances. Tell him that I want all about the habits of *any* Birds which he has written upon, especially, however, those found from the beginning of his journeys until his return, and appertaining to species belonging to our fauna or otherwise. Their exact measurements, dates, localities, migratories or vice versa inclinations, descriptions of nests, eggs &c. periods of breeding; in a word all that he can, or will be pleased to send me — and you may assure Townsend, that all he will confide to me will be published as coming from *him*, although I may think fit to alter the phraseology in some instances. Tell him to be extremely careful in the naming his new species, and that [if] he thinks of difficulties in this matter, to leave it to me, as *here* I am able to see all the late published works (and they are not a few) and work out the species with more advantage than any one can at present in Philadelphia. Do not take this as egotism far from it, it is in friendship and for his sake that I venture on undertaking such an arduous task. I am *exceedingly* [anxious] to receive a letter from him (for Nutall, though an excellent friend of mine and a most worthy man, will not answer me in time on this subject) of *all* the birds contained in the *plates* now at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philada., *which he saw on the Rocky Mountains*, over those mountains, *on the Columbia River* and off *the coast of our Western boundaries*. This I want much, and if he would simply dictate to you plate 1. not there, plate 2. there, plate 3 there &c. &c. this would amply answer my purpose, and this I wish you not to neglect to forward me *as soon as possible by duplicate!* Of course I cannot speak upon any one of the new species of which you speak until I have examined them all. To talk of new species in

London is a matter not now understood in any part of America, and sorry will you be as well as himself, when I assure you that out of the *twelve* supposed to be, and published by Dr. Morton, from Townsend's first cargo, not more than six are actually undescribed, although I have taken upon myself the risk of publishing *his* names to the Birds on my plate, but which of course I am obliged to correct in my letter press. *The little beautiful owl*, I would venture to say has been described by Vigors at least ten years ago, &c. &c. Swainson never goes to bed without describing some new species, and Charles Bonaparte, during his late visit to London, has published as many as 20 of a night at the Museum of the Zoological Society Insects &c. &c. Stir, work hard, [be] *prompt* in everything. My work *must* soon be finished, and unless *all is received here* by the month of May next, why I shall have to abandon to others what I might myself have accomplished. God bless you, many happy years. We are all well, thank God, just now. Remember me and us kindly to all around and every friend and believe me ever your most truly and sincerely attached friend,

John J. Audubon.

To Edward Harris, Esq^{re}.

Addressed, care "Messrs. Rathbone, Brothers & Co.

When you send to Liverpool.

Liverpool."

¹If Townsend has brought Birds Eggs, ask him to send them me. I will return all to him that he may want. I greatly regret that you did not find me the *water* Birds of which you speak, as I might have perchance found something new or curious among them. The Golden Eye Duck especially, if any he had?

J. J. Audubon.

¹ This paragraph, with the signature, is the only part of this letter in Audubon's own hand. The preceding portion was a copy of his draft, and marked "Duplicate." Undoubtedly Audubon had to make so many alterations in the original that he was ashamed to forward it. The address on the wrapper is Audubon's penmanship.

LETTER No. 2.¹

Edinburgh, 14th. Sep^r., 1838.

My Dear Friend:

Not having received anything from you in answer to my last, I suppose that you may yet be away from Glasgow, but as we ourselves are going off tomorrow morning to the "Highlands," with a view to be at Glasgow on Thursday next, I write to you now, with the hope of meeting with you *then!* Nothing of importance has occurred here since my last, but *the book* has considerably swollen in its progress towards completion.

We all unite in best wishes to you and I remain as ever your most truly attached and sincere friend,

John J. Audubon.

We intend being at home again on Saturday next.

LETTER No. 3.²

Edinburgh December 19th., 1838.

My Dear Friend:

Your letter of the 13th. instant to Victor reached us this morning, and glad were we all to hear from you.

My object in writing to you is, for the purpose of assuring you that I feel great in preparing a box of bird skins for you according to your desire. It is true, however, that as I am now on the eve of commencing my synoptical arrangement of our birds, I shall not be able to show you as many of my specimens I could otherwise have done, but you must take the will for the deed. The

¹ Outside address:

To Edward Harris Esq^r.
Comrie's Royal Hotel,
Glasgow.

² Outside address:

To Edward Harris Esq^r.
Care of Messrs. Hottinguer & Co.
Paris.

Box will be taken as far as London by Victor, who will leave us on the first of January. You will find in it a list of the contents, and I trust such bird skins as may answer your purpose well. Besides these Victor will also attend to your request as soon as in New York and will ship to you by way of Havre as you direct.

I am glad that you should have seen what you conceive to be the great *rara avis* *F. Washingtonii*. I am sorry you could not have pocketed it, but who knows if it is not left yet in store for you and I to shoot a pair of these noble birds at The West, and that, after having satisfactorily examined its habits, its eggs, or its young! *Bonaparte*, between you and I, is exceedingly ignorant as regards our birds, as I found to my cost when he was in London, and where he pumped me sadly too much, but it is now over and I forgive him as I do all others who have or who *may* try to injure me.

John Bachman wrote to me that he had left in commission to Trudeau, the purchase for me of a copy of Vieillot's *Osieaux de l'Amérique Septentrionale* and also a copy of Boié or Bojé work on birds generally, but I have received neither books or promises of them from Trudeau. Pray ask him something upon this subject, and if he has not purchased them as yet, perhaps you would undertake the task yourself, and show to Havell as soon as possible, for I shall be sadly in want of them in a few weeks more. I should also like you to try to find Mr. Augustus Thorndike of Boston, to whom Victor wrote a few days ago, with the view to enquire from that Gentleman when he wished *his* copy of the *Birds of America* to be delivered. Victor addressed the letter to "his Hotel" or to the care of the "American Embassy." We are not sure, however, whether he is in Paris at present, and let me know what discoveries you have made as regards this. — Victor will remain ten days in London and wishes you, should you write to him there, to put your letter *under cover* to *Havell* and request him to *keep* it. Victor will write to you from thence.

I cannot account why Trudeau has not written to me in answer to my last, now full two months old? Should you *perchance* discover a specimen of the Bird of Washington in Paris and purchase the same, I should like you to send it me *on loan* to enable me to compare it with mine, and the Immature of the *F. Albicilla of Europe!*

I have got twelve sheets of the 5th. Vol. of Biographies already printed, and I expect to have quite finished by the 1st. of April next. I have decided on the *Trichas* resembling *Sylvia Philadelphica* of Wilson. It is a distinct species, but what will probably surprise you more, the *S. Agilis* of the same author is also perfectly distinct from either. All this you will plainly see when you read their separate descriptions and compare the three species.

I wish you would ask Trudeau whether *he* recollects the specimen of an Eagle sent by Townsend in his first collection, numbering 54 and which the latter has lost, though he considered it as a new species. It was procured in California. Townsend speaks sorrowfully of the loss of this specimen. It never came under my eye, did it come under yours? Ask Trudeau whether he ever saw my *Hirundo Serripennis* in America, Bachman wrote to me that Trudeau thought he had at New York in the skins of Frederick Ward. I think Trudeau will be pleased with the anatomy of our birds, as it opens mysteries hitherto unknown in connection with the relative affinities of some species toward others and assists in the formation of groups &c., in what some day or other, will be called a *Natural arrangement!*

I wish I could have spent a few weeks in Paris with you and Trudeau, as I readily imagine that some new species of North American birds may yet be found there unknown to the World of Science. I have written to Mr. Chevalier and to Townsend, but will not, I dare say, hear anything more of the former until through Victor, who intends to see him very shortly after his arrival in America.

My Dear Wife is much better than when you saw her, and I hope that when once again she has been safely landed on our shores and enjoyed the warmth of our own Summers, her health will be quite restored.

The *Little Lucy* has grown as fat as butter, and the rest of us are well.

We all unite in kindest best wishes to you and to Trudeau, and I remain as ever, my Dear Friend,

Yours,

John J. Audubon.

6 Alva Street.